

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

**MINUTES OF A MEETING
(VIRTUAL MEETING)**

9 JULY 2021

11.10 AM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson presiding
Mr M Graham, Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Ms B Anley
Mr J Craig
Mr C Enright
Mr K Henning
Mr R Irvine
Mr T O'Hanlon
Mr J Quinn
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith

APOLOGIES: Mr G Smyth

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Deeney, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
(Transformation, Performance & Governance)
Mr P Gallagher, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Service
Delivery)
Mr A Jennings, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Service
Support)
Mrs P White, Interim Director of Finance
Miss D Reynolds, Head of Planning, Performance &
Governance
Ms I Hill, Governance & Business Support Services Advisor

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

The Chairperson commented positively on the Shared Services Information Session which had been facilitated by Paul Marriner from Deloitte prior to the Board Meeting. She noted that a copy of Mr Marriner's presentation will be circulated in due course.

Referring to the Business Improvement Session held on 29 June, the Chairperson noted that a number of Members, including herself, had not been able to attend and informed Members that the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance was looking at dates in September for a catch-up session.

Mr Enright reported on the Business Improvement Session highlighting the positive progress attained. It was agreed that NIFRS needs to embed Business Improvement as part of normal business.

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies from Members were noted.

Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

The Chairperson enquired as to whether any Members of the Board wished to declare any potential conflicts of interest with any of the business items on the Agenda. Members confirmed there were no apparent conflicts of interest.

Mr Enright declared a potential conflict of interest with respect to Agenda Item 4 – Strategic Outline Case for Continuation Lease between NIFRS and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council for Office Accommodation. The Chairperson noted same and stated that if she considered it appropriate she would request Mr Enright to leave the Meeting for this item of business.

Item 3: Minutes of Board Meeting – 25 May 2021

The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 25 May 2021, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to minor amendments, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Ms Anley.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Public Sector Pensions Update

The Chairperson referred to the discussion around the McCloud remedy and the suggestion of the establishment of a small Working Group with the Interim Director of Finance, to work through the issues and provide Member oversight. She reported on her discussion with the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explaining that that it had been agreed to nominate one Member to the Working Group given the number of workstreams requiring Board input and also acknowledging the benefit of nominating someone with a working knowledge of pensions.

The Chairperson proposed that Mr Quinn, given his wealth of knowledge of the Pension Schemes, represent the Board on the Working Group. Ms Anley seconded the proposal. **Action to follow** CFRO Graham to engage with Mr Quinn to set up an initial meeting.

Financial Oversight Review

The Chairperson sought an update on progress with respect to the development of an Action Plan to address the Review's recommendations and the monitoring and scrutiny of same to the Board.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on the current position. He explained that as the Finance Report is presented to the Board, updates on progress against the Action Plan are brought to the full Board.

Motor Insurance Business Case Update

The Chairperson referred to the Board's request that a letter be forwarded to the appropriate Department noting the Board's comments/issues raised regarding the DoH's position with respect to motor vehicle insurance for passengers.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that, whilst the letter had been drafted, there had been a delay due to the need to identify the appropriate person/ Department and added that he also wished to have initial contact before issuing the letter. He stated he would provide a full update at the next Meeting.

The Chairperson highlighted that the Board had raised a number of concerns regarding this matter and requested that the letter once written should be circulated to Members and update on the response to come to the September meeting.

Finance Report

Referring to concerns raised regarding the rising level of Agency staff within NIFRS and the cost of same, the Chairperson stressed the importance of Members receiving a detailed update on this matter across Directorates along with the associated costs. She reiterated that this had been an ongoing matter which members had raised for a number of years.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted the current position and stated that a detailed report would be presented to the next Meeting of the People & Culture Committee.

The Chairperson noted this suggestion however she stated that it was appropriate that the full Board was updated on the numbers of Agency staff and the full Board approved costs across each Directorate for its next meeting in September.

Update on Independent Review into Issues around the Investigation Processes and Timescales

The Chairperson sought an update on the review of key governance policies.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney outlined delays with obtaining Representative Body approvals which resulted in delays against the previous implementation date of 30 June 2021. Members noted that a deadline of 26 July 2021 has been set and implementation will progress immediately thereafter. The Chairperson advised that it would be important to have an update on this at the next Board meeting.

Ms Anley referred to Health & Safety matters and enquired how the Board will be updated with regard to same.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer advised that he was considering the approach to how this would be effected.

He provided a verbal update the proposed Health & Safety Case Study approach and suggested that this could be taken forward at the November Meeting.

During discussion, Members suggested that a Health & Safety update should be added a separate Agenda item going forward. The Chairperson requested that the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance should liaise with Mr Irvine the Health and Safety champion and consider the way forward.

Ms Anley suggested the introduction of a separate 'Matters Arising Table' which might assist the Chairperson in reviewing the Minutes. The Chairperson noted this suggestion

Pensions Board

At its Meeting on 23 March 2021, the Board agreed in principle the structure for the Firefighters' Pension Board; including the appointment of an external independent Chair of the Firefighters' Pension Board subject to further detail being presented to the Board.

Members noted a Briefing Paper providing further information to the Board with regard to the recruitment of Independent Chair to the Pensions Board.

The Interim Director of Finance provided an update on previous discussions around the Chairperson of the Pension Board. It was confirmed that the Pension Board Chairperson should be an Independent Chairperson appointed via a separate recruitment process. She gave an overview of the information presented covering roles and responsibilities noting that these reflect those in HSC and other Public Bodies and align to the DoH Pensions Board Chairperson. With regard to reporting lines, she outlined CPANI's recommendation, ie, that the role report to the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer as Accounting Officer and Board Member. She informed Members that CPANI had confirmed that this was not a public appointment. She noted the potential recruitment processes.

The Chairperson referred to the points she had raised previously regarding the recruitment process and reiterated her preference for an Independent Assessor to be part of the Panel. She sought clarification as to who appraises the Pension Board Chair. The Interim Director of Finance explained that this would be the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer in line with CPANI's recommendation.

During discussion, the Interim Director of Finance answered Members' questions/ provided clarification relating to aspects of the information presented and noted Members' commented with respect to the Person Specification and also a potential conflict of interest with regard to the reporting lines. Members also commented on the relationship between the Pension Board and the NIFRS Board and the need for a reporting flow into the Board in its oversight role. The Interim Director of Finance clarified the position in relation to the reporting lines for the Pension Board Chair and explained that in relation to information flows to the NIFRS Board, quarterly reporting was a consideration.

The Chairperson stated that she was content with this approach as long as there is a reporting flow into the Board. Members agreed.

Referring to the issue of performance management, the Interim Director of Finance stated that the Pension Board Chair is not a public appointment. She suggested that consideration be given to applying NIFRS' Performance Management approach to the role and added that this approach could be reviewed in the future. The Chairperson enquired if Members were content with this suggestion. **Members agreed that NIFRS Performance Management be applied to the role.**

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr O'Hanlon, unanimously agreed to approve the role and responsibilities of the Pension Board Chair; the Person Specification and the reporting lines as contained in the Briefing Paper.

With respect to the Appointment Panel, the Chairperson proposed that, given their work on a separate pension matter, Mr Enright and Mrs Singleton, plus another Member, form the Panel. The proposal was seconded by Mr Irvine.

Subsequently, on the motion of Ms McKinney, seconded by Ms Anley, it was agreed that the Panel consist of Mr Enright (Chair), Mrs Singleton. Ms Smith had volunteered to be the third member on the panel. The Chairperson thanked her for doing so, She also thanked Mr Enright and Mrs Singleton for agreeing to participate.

The Chairperson pointed out the need for Recruitment & Selection training to be conducted in advance of the recruitment process. **Members agreed to this.**

With respect to the role of Technical Assessor to the Panel, the Chairperson suggested that the Interim Director of Finance might wish to take on this role. **Members agreed to this approach and requested that the appointment was taken forward after the summer recess.**

Item 4: Items for Adoption/Approval Reports from Board Committees, including noting of Committee Minutes and Adoption of Recommendations

Service Delivery Committee - Meeting – 1 July 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 1 July 2021 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Irvine, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, presented the recommendation emanating from the Meeting.

Mr Irvine proposed that the Committee's recommendation, as detailed below, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded Ms Smith.

Service Delivery Committee – Recommendation

- **Approval of the On-Call Contract and Management Systems Proposal Paper.**

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 2 July 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 2 July 2021. The Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Enright, Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Member, noted the recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

Mr Enright, proposed that the Committee’s recommendations, as detailed below, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Irvine.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Recommendations

- **Approval of the Internal Audit Charter;**
- **Approval of the draft 2020/21 Report To Those Charged With Governance (RTTCWG);**
- **Approval of the draft Governance Document Review Policy subject to a minor amendment;**
- **Approval of the revised Risk Management Policy and Procedure subject to a minor amendment.**

Standalone Strategic Items

Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2020/21

The draft Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2020/21 was noted.

Members further noted that the draft Annual Report & Statement of Accounts were reviewed by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee on 2 July 2021 and the Committee recommends approval of the draft document subject to any further amendments being presented to the Board.

The Interim Director of Finance provided a synopsis of the key areas within the Accounts and reported that a breakeven position had been achieved. She also noted the Report To Those Charged With Governance had been reviewed by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance highlighted the salient points within the Annual Report noting that there had been no subsequent changes.

The Chairperson and Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted the positive report and thanked the Head of Performance Planning and Governance, Finance Directorate and all others who contributed to the Report for their hard work.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mrs Singleton, unanimously agreed to approve that the Chairperson and Chief Fire & Rescue Officer sign off of the draft Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2020/21.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairperson proposed that the next Agenda Item - NIFRS Financial Plan 2020/21 – be deferred to later in the Meeting. Ms Anley seconded the proposal.

Board Governance Update

Members noted the following documents which have been reviewed as part of the ongoing Board Governance Review:

NIFRS Standing Orders;
NIFRS Scheme of Delegation; and
NIFRS Standing Financial Instructions.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided a detailed overview of the key changes to NIFRS Standing Orders.

During discussion, the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance noted Members' comments and answered Members' questions/provided clarification regarding the revised Standing Orders.

The Chairperson referred to the change relating to the fact that there will be no Vice-Chairpersons across committees and the Board and whilst fully accepting the legislative position she wished to express her sincere thanks to Mr Henning for his support and leadership in that role. She advised members that his contribution working closely alongside her was deeply appreciated.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Ms Anley, unanimously approved the revised NIFRS Standing Orders subject to amendments.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance referred to the Scheme of Delegation and the Standing Financial Instructions and summarised the key changes. She explained that the delegated limits within the documentation required to be updated to reflect a change in NIFRS' delegated limits.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer informed Members that NIFRS' delegated authority for Capital Expenditure had been raised which will allow NIFRS to plan and deliver projects more effectively.

Mr Irvine welcomed the increase in the delegated limits which was a reflection of the good work of the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and his Team and also the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance and also Board Members in driving forward the Business Improvement processes within the organisation.

The Chairperson concurred with Mr Irvine's comments and echoed the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer's appreciation of the work done to reach this position.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Mr Enright, unanimously approved the revised NIFRS Scheme of Delegation and revised NIFRS Standing Financial Instructions, subject to amendment.

The Meeting adjourned at 12.50 pm for 5 mins
Meeting reconvened at 12.55 pm

NIFRS Financial Plan 2020/21

Members noted the draft 2020/21 Financial Plan (Break-Even and Capital Plan) 2020/21.

The Interim Director of Finance explained that NIFRS is required to put in place a plan to ensure financial breakeven at year end. The purpose of this paper is to provide assurance to the Board and DoH that NIFRS has an agreed financial plan in place that will deliver balanced resource and capital budgets in 2021/22. She gave a detailed overview of the key assumptions within the Plan, along with the financial planning risks and the breakeven measures.

The Interim Director of Finance informed Members that the general capital allocation for 2021/22 is £7m and noted that LDC Cookstown is funded through a ring-fenced capital allocation and the current allocation is £1.9m.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer thanked the Interim Director of Finance and the senior team for their work in developing the Breakeven Plan.

Referring to the breakeven measures, the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer acknowledged the sensitivities of some of the proposed measures which will impact on frontline service delivery such as changes in crewing at Antrim, Armagh and Dunmurry. He assured Members that all breakeven measures have been fully risk assessed and explained, however, that there had not been an opportunity to consult on the proposed measures. He noted discussions had been held with DoH.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer emphasised that unless these measures are put in place, NIFRS will not achieve a breakeven position. He stated that whilst the Plan had been presented, NIFRS will continue to work with DoH regarding funding.

The Chairperson noted discussions had taken place with DoH and the concerns raised regarding funding levels. She enquired if those concerns had been committed to writing and an ask for additional funds made to DOH

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that, as yet, those concerns had not been put in writing.

The Chairperson invited comments from Members.

During a full and detailed discussion, Officers answered Members' questions relating to the information presented and noted Members' comments around the need to write to DoH regarding additional funding and noting their grave concerns regarding the lack of any consultations having been conducted.

Following further discussion, the Board accepted the draft NIFRS Financial Plan 2021/22 (but did not give final approval) subject to the Board revisiting this Plan in September when the new Chief Fire & Rescue Officer takes up post.

The Board directed the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer to raise with DoH the grave concerns of the Board around the urgent need for all relevant consultations being conducted and the need for additional funding.

However, given the pressing situation as outlined by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, the Board authorised him to commence the interim operationalisation of the draft Plan. This was caveated that the Plan would be reviewed at the end of September.

Mr Quinn requested, for the reasons as outlined during discussion, that his opposition to this proposal be recorded.

Strategic Outline Case (SOC) between NIFRS and Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA)

The Board, at its Meeting on 25 May, approved the Strategic Outline Case (Property Transactions) for Service Level Agreement between NIFRS and Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) for accommodation at Bangor Fire Station.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings explained that on submission to DoH, a minor discrepancy in the size of the area to be leased to MCA was noticed. This has subsequently been amended and, for completeness, the SOC is now represented for Board approval

The Board, on the motion of Mr Craig, seconded by Ms Smith, unanimously approved the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) between NIFRS and Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Business Cases

Business Case for Construction of a New Fire Station at Cushendall

The Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the construction of a new Fire Station at Cushendall.

At this point,
Ms Anley left the Meeting (2.50 pm)

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided an overview of the project.

During discussion, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings answered Members' questions/provided clarification relating to the information presented.

Business Case for Fire Risk Assessment Remedial Programme

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for Fire Risk Assessment Remedial Programme.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined the purpose of the project. He answered Members' questions relating to same.

Strategic Outline Case (Property Transactions) for Continuation Lease between NIFRS and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council for Office Accommodation

The Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for Continuation Lease between NIFRS and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council for Office Accommodation was noted.

At this point,
Mr Enright left the Meeting (2.57 pm)

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided an explanation of the background to the SOC and its purpose.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Craig, seconded by Mr Henning, unanimously approved Business Case for Construction of a New Fire Station at Cushendall; Business Case for Fire Risk Assessment Remedial Programme; and the Strategic Outline Case (Property Transactions) for Continuation Lease between NIFRS and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council for Office Accommodation.

Item 5: Items for Information/Noting

Finance Report

The Finance Report updating Members on the financial position for the period ended 31 May 2021 was noted.

The Interim Director of Finance noted the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2021/22. She further noted that the breakeven plan is predicated on the assumption that £1.4m will be made available for COVID related spend and highlighted that NIFRS has received informal confirmation from DoH that our bid has been successful. She provided a breakdown of how the £1.4m will be allocated. Referring to the overtime and training backlog costs, the Interim Director of Finance explained that, due to the manual nature of payroll claim forms and the overtime allocation process, it is proposed that these areas of spend be presented quarterly.

Referring to Revenue performance as at 31 May, the Interim Director of Finance noted a small underspend, however, she stated that this had moved significantly in June to an overspend noting the key budget pressures.

With respect to the Capital Budget, the Interim Director of Finance updated Members on the position as at 31 May 2021. She noted that the general capital allocation for 2021/22 is £7m and further noted that LDC Cookstown is funded through a ring-fenced capital allocation and the current allocation is £1.9m.

The Interim Director of Finance reported positively on NIFRS Prompt Payment Performance and noted the current position with respect to Business Case approvals.

Update on Independent Review into Issues around the Investigation Processes and Timescales

Members noted the Independent Review Action Plan Update as at 30 June 2021.

The Chairperson reverted to Mr Quinn, Board Representative on the Independent Review Working Group, and sought assurance that he was content with progress. Mr Quinn reported positively on progress and commended Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney and his Team on the progress achieved.

Project Highlight Report

A Project Highlight Report providing updates on COVID-19; Service Delivery Modelling; and EU Exit was noted.

Performance Management

Members noted the Performance Management Updates for the period up to 31 May 2021 including the Performance Reports from each of the Standing Committees.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Annual Report

Members noted the 2020/21 Annual Report of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

Reports from Committees, including noting of Committee Minutes and adoption of Recommendations

Service Delivery Committee - Minutes – 11 May 2021

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 11 May 2021 were noted. It was also noted that the recommendation contained therein was adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 May 2021.

People & Culture Committee - Minutes – 11 May 2021

The Minutes of the Meeting of the People & Culture Committee held on 11 May 2021 were noted. It was also noted that the recommendation contained therein was adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 May 2021.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Minutes – 13 May 2021

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 13 May 2021 were noted. It was also noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 May 2021.

People & Culture Committee - Minutes – 1 July 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee had been held on 1 July 2021. There were recommendations emanating from the Meeting. The Minutes will be presented for noting at the next Meeting of the Board.

Item 6: Chairperson's Business

Boardroom Apprentice

The Chairperson noted that the Board had previously hosted 2 Boardroom Apprentices and would be partaking in the programme again this year. She informed Members that this year's Apprentice is Chris Love and plans were underway to arrange a meet and greet with him in August.

The Chairperson stated that Mr Craig had agreed to be Mr Love's Non-Executive Mentor and the Director of HR and Head of Planning, Performance & Governance Executive Mentors.

The Chairperson congratulated Ms Susan McKinney and Ms Maria Curry on their appointments as Boardroom Apprentices in the Southern Health Trust and the Charity Commissioner respectively.

Bonfires

Following an invitation from the Chairperson, the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on NIFRS preparations and work with partner agencies over the weekend with respect to bonfires.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 8: Documents for Sealing

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Emergency Services Design Team Framework – Refurbishment & Development Antrim Fire Station; and

Tom Smyth and Ronald Matthews T/A MSM Promotions – Lease for Dunmurry Fire Station,

Item 9: Schedule of Future Meetings, etc

A Schedule of Meetings, etc, was noted.

The Chairperson reminded Members that Minister Swann will be joining the Board at its Meeting in September.

She noted that a date for a Business Improvement Catch-Up Session in September is to be confirmed.

The Chairperson referred to the earlier discussions with respect to the Breakeven Plan, and enquired how the Board will receive feedback.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated that it would be appropriate to progress as discussed. He agreed to write to DOH and report back in to the Board.

The Chairperson stressed that, given the matter under discussion, she was happy to have a special meeting of the Board, if he deemed useful, to support the approach to DOH.

HSC Handbook for Board Members

The Chairperson referred to IHRD Implementation Circular IHRD/01/2021 relating to the issue of the HSC Handbook for Board Members and noted that the Handbook, a resource for reference when required, had been circulated to all Members.

She noted that Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney would make the submission on behalf of the Board.

The Chairperson brought the open meeting to a close. She thanked the members for their contribution and expressed that she looked forward to the time when everyone could come together in the Boardroom to engage in meetings. She recognised that the virtual environment was at times challenging over the year given e.g. IT glitches as well as everyone adjusting to working in very different ways during the pandemic. She considered that the induction of new members had been very thorough and successful. She thanked the Executives and other NIFRS contributors for their work on this. She was now working towards the time when members would be out visiting stations and also other NIFRS facilities. She would revisit this in September and update members on same.

The Chairperson wished everyone a restful summer.

The Open meeting ended at 3.07 pm